

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A) Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name First Methodist Episcopal Church

Other name/site number Stafford United Methodist Church

2. Location

Street & number 219 West Stafford ☐ not for publication

City or town Stafford ☐ vicinity

State Kansas Code KS Country Stafford Code 185 Zip code 67578

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Richard D. Landers, Deputy SAPO 8/30/02
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Kansas State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional
Comments.)

Signature of commenting official /Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- ☐ entered in the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other, (explain:)

First Methodist Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Stafford, Kansas
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☒ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ Previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
- Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1925-27

Significant Dates

1925-27

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Don Buel Schuler (1888-1972)

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:

Stafford United Methodist Church

First Methodist Episcopal Church

Stafford, Kansas

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)
count.)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

total

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Previously listed in the National Register

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter Categories from instructions)

Religion: religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Exterior: English Collegiate Gothic

Interior: Prairie School

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: Concrete footings supporting a concrete foundation

Walls: brick with limestone trim

Roof: Asphalt

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See attachments

First Methodist Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Stafford, Kansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1/4 of a block, Less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	4	5	3	4	9	2	0			4	2	0	1	6	6	0
1 Zone		Easting						Northing								
2																

3																
3 Zone		Easting						Northing								
4																

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title Dr. Pamela D. Kingsbury
Organization Historic Preservation Consulting Date April 16, 2002
Street & number 224 North Crestway Telephone (316) 686-1731
City or town Wichita State Kansas Zip code 67208-3840

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

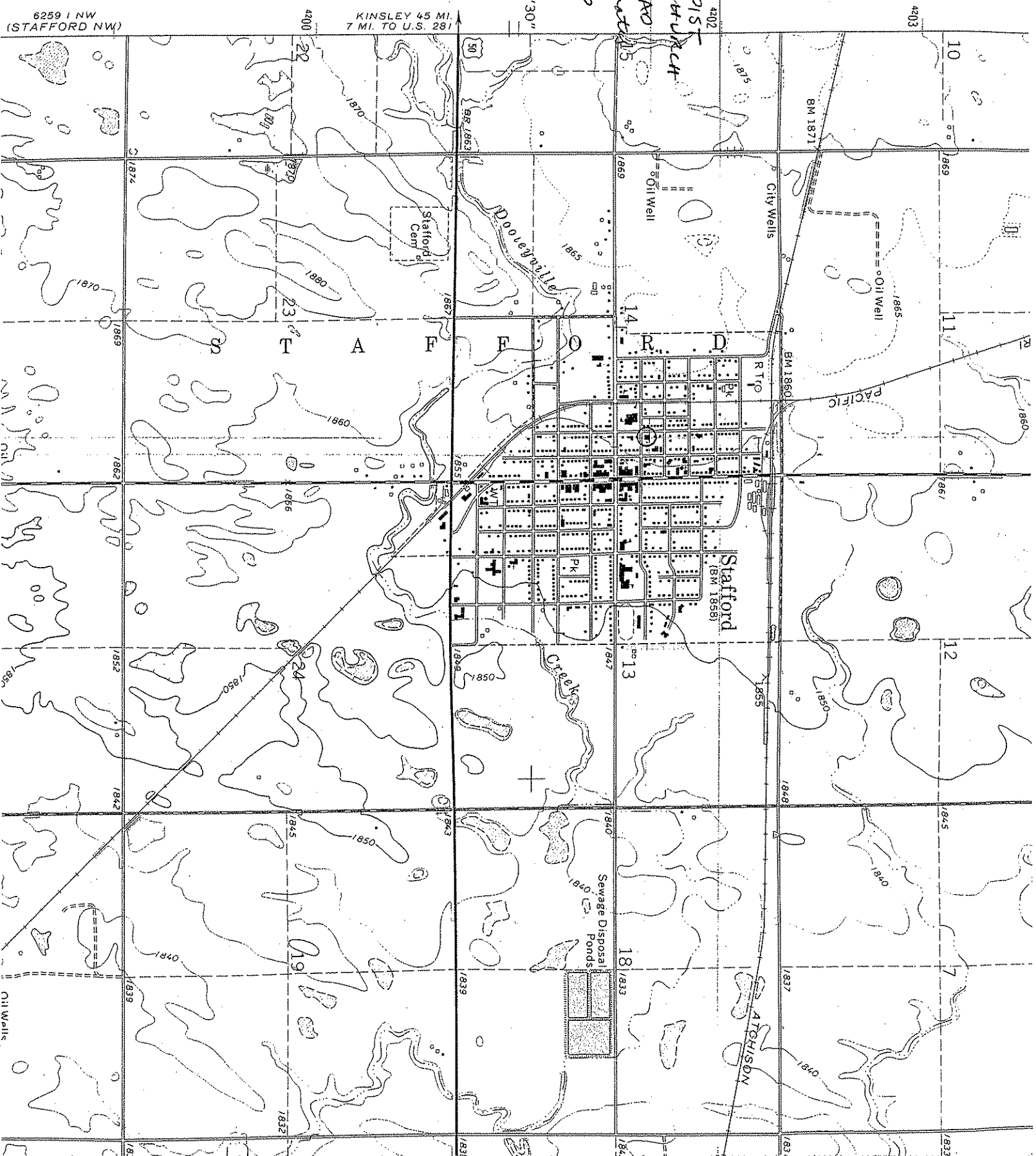
Property Owner

name Stafford United Methodist Church
street & number 219 West Stafford telephone (620)234-5055
city or town Stafford state Kansas zip code 67578

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16) U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

FIRST METHODIST
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
STAFFORD ROAD
V. Goodman
14 534920
4201660



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Description

Exterior

The First Methodist Episcopal Church is located at 218 West Stafford Street in Stafford, Kansas, two blocks from the main street of downtown Stafford and in a residential neighborhood of Revival style houses such as Dutch and Tudor Revival along with ranch style residences. The church was designed by Don Buel Schuler (1888-1972) of Schuler and Company of Wichita, Kansas. The corner stone of the church was laid on September 6, 1925, the basement was completed in the fall of 1926, and the church was dedicated on May 22, 1927 (Plate 1).¹ The two-story church with a full basement, is a brown brick building with running bond and flush mortar joints, limestone trim and a concrete foundation supported by twenty-nine concrete footings. The church is almost square, being slightly longer than it is wide and is an auditorium-type church.

The First Methodist Episcopal Church is one of the most extraordinary churches in the state of Kansas. The church differs architecturally from all Stafford's other churches built in the conventional Gothic Revival style. Its exterior is an interpretation in a stream-lined form of the English Collegiate Gothic and on its interior in the sanctuary an imaginative interpretation of the Prairie School deriving from Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois (1905-1909). Indeed, viewing the exterior, one would think it is a secular rather than an ecclesiastical building, perhaps, a school auditorium or gymnasium. The church's exterior bears a strong allegiance to the English Collegiate Gothic high school of 1916 less than a block away within view from the church. Nor does the exterior of the church give any hint of the unusual nature of its sanctuary in the interior.

The south, front, elevation has a ground floor of two bays with double casement windows flanking the staircase and a door on the east side of the staircase leading to the basement. A wide limestone string course that wraps around the building divides the ground floor from the first floor (Plate 2).

¹ n. a., *History of The First Methodist Church of Stafford, Kansas: From It's (sic) Beginning to May, 1965*, n. p., n. d., pp. 4-5.

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The first floor of the church is reached by a staircase with eighteen steps, and a landing and is flanked by brick parapets capped with limestone blocks. Five bays define the first floor, three entrance doors flanked by casement windows with opaque milky yellow and white glazing. The three-bay central section is slightly projecting and consists of three portals which is typical of European ecclesiastical architecture. Flanking the three entrances are large brick stepped-wall buttresses capped with pointed limestone finials that define the first and second stories and continue upward, breaking through the roof line. Each entrance has double doors with a transom above it. Above each transom is a limestone frieze decorated with four discs in relief followed by a limestone string course that wraps around the building and separates the first from the second story. As indicated in the blue print of the front elevation, Schuler intended to have eight small lancet windows in place of the three over five clear glass transoms, which would have added a High Gothic character to the front elevation.

The second story consists of five bays of five windows sitting on a limestone string course that wraps around the building. The three-bay central section consists of triple casement windows with opaque milky yellow and white glazing. Between the doors are the stepped wall buttresses raising from the first floor and continuing upward through the roof line. Flanking the central section are double casement windows with the same opaque glazing as elsewhere on the elevation. Above is a limestone disc frieze over each door followed by several brick courses and then the roof line (Plate 3).

As originally designed and built, the pyramidal roof was slightly upward thrusting with a skylight in the center to illuminate the thirty-six stained glass panels in the ceiling of the sanctuary. In 1955, the original roof was removed and a new one installed and the skylight closed because it leaked.

The east and west elevations are virtually the same except for a brick chimney on the east elevation and the slightly different fenestration pattern of the two elevations. The east elevation has an eight-bay basement of double casement windows except for the second window from the southeast corner which is a single casement window. The central section of six bays projects slightly from the elevation. A brick chimney is located between the next to the last and the last window at the northeast corner and continues through all

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three stories, rising above the roof line. The broad limestone string course that wraps around the building divides the basement from the first floor, which like the basement slightly projects from the elevation.

The first story consists of thirteen bays with two pairs of double hung casement windows with opaque milky yellow and white glazing flanking the nine bay projecting central section which consists of double casement windows with the same opaque glazing. Eight of the casement windows, which are slightly off center, sit on a limestone string course and illuminate the side rooms flanking the sanctuary. A disc frieze terminates the projecting central section and above it a limestone string course separates the first from the second floor.

The second story of fourteen windows sits on the limestone string course separating the first and second stories. The ten-bay central section has single casement windows with opaque milky yellow and white glazing and is flanked by double casement windows on either side with the same glazing. A single casement window with opaque glazing abuts the brick chimney on the north followed by a double casement window with opaque glass at the northeast corner. All the windows except for the two next to the northeast corner illuminate the balcony area of the sanctuary. Terminating the second story is the disc frieze followed by several brick courses then the roof line (Plate 4).

The west elevation is virtually identical to the east elevation but is without a brick chimney and has nine windows in the basement instead of the eight that define east elevation's basement (Plate 5).

The north, rear, elevation has been altered slightly and consists of a basement story of six bays with two doors at each side that break through the limestone string course. Between the doors are four double casement windows with clear glazing. A broad limestone string course separates the basement from the first story. Originally, the first story consisted of seven double casement windows with milky yellow and white glazing. The second and sixth windows are situated well above the other windows in order to illuminate the stairs to the organ loft. The only alteration to the elevation is the replacement of the third window at the northeast corner with a door. A limestone string NPS

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course separates the first from the second floor that is without any fenestration and is terminated by the disc frieze followed by brick courses then the roof line (Plate 6).

Interiors

One enters the church through one of three doors into the vestibule or narthex of the church. Sun light from the three doors and the transoms illuminates the vestibule that acts as a transitional area between the exterior, secular world and the interior, ecclesiastical world of the church's sanctuary. The only association with the sanctuary is the four pyramidal stained glass light lamps hanging from the vestibule's ceiling. These pyramid lamps with their yellow stained glazing with colorful chevron patterns defining the mid-section of each of the four sides of the pyramid, are repeated in a larger version on the sanctuary ceiling (Plate 7).

Flanking the sanctuary to the east are a series of six rooms beginning with a meeting room with a restroom followed by classrooms and a chapel. To the west are six rooms. The pastor's office and next to it is the secretary's office followed by classrooms and meeting rooms. Straight ahead up four steps is the sanctuary of the church that is a world apart from the transitional vestibule and the secular world outside the church.

Upon entering the sanctuary of the First Methodist Episcopal Church, one is in the worship space sealed-off from the outside world as well as from the rest of the church. A central aisle flanked by twelve rows of the original walnut pews leads to the raised chancel with an organ console to the left followed by a lectern, a communion table in the center, another lectern and a piano. Behind the communion table is a raised area for the choir and behind it walnut paneling and above the walnut organ screen that runs the full length of the chancel. Schuler designed the walnut paneling and organ screen and in 1931, the church installed a Molar organ, which parishioners claim is the only pipe organ between Hutchinson and Dodge City.²

Balconies occupy the side and the rear of the sanctuary and are reached by stairs flanking the chancel and in the corners at the rear of the sanctuary.

² n. a., *History of the First Methodist Church, Stafford, Kansas*, p. 6

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Originally, Schuler's plan called for the rear balcony to be used as the assembly room for the junior department of the Sunday school and, if needed, as additional seating for the sanctuary. At the northeast and northwest corners of the balcony are three classrooms and stairs leading to the sanctuary and basement. The ceiling and the walls of the sanctuary are rendered in off-white plaster. Pairs of walnut bands, which have a elastic sense to them and are continuous and flowing, spring from a single walnut band located above the balcony windows, and demarcate the balconies, chancel and choir and lead the eye from one surface to another.

The most extraordinary aspect of the sanctuary is its lighting. Arrayed across the sanctuary's ceiling in six rows of six are thirty-six stained-glass boxes termed "sunlight glass"³ for the predominate yellow color that dominates each glass box. Each box has wood strips that divide and subdivide each square with small green stained-glass squares in the inner and outer corners of each square. Originally, each box was illuminated by a skylight situated in the middle of the roof. In 1955, the old roof was removed and a new one installed. At the same time, the skylight, which had leaked for years, was removed, a roof put in its place, and an electric light bulb was inserted in each box to provide illumination. This alteration has enriched the quality of the "sunlight" emanating from the thirty-six stained-glass boxes, providing a steady stream of light during the day as well as in the evening (Plate 8).

Hanging from the four corners of the ceiling are stained-glass pyramid lamps with yellow stained glass and green, red and yellow chevrons down the center of each of the four sides in the same manner as the pyramidal stained-glass lamps hanging from the vestibule's ceiling (Plate 9). The clerestory windows above the side and rear balconies have opaque milky yellow and white stained glass that further enhances the "sunlight" effect in the sanctuary. Three box lights also with the same glazing are located in the three balconies and another five box lights with the same stained glass illuminate the chancel and choir.

All the light in the sanctuary, except for the minimal amount of natural light issuing from the three entrance doors and their transoms, is yellow in color. Light has always been a symbol of God in Christian churches. The flood

³ *Wichita Eagle*, April 29, 1923, p.12

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of yellow light in the sanctuary glorifying the sun serves to emphasize the distinction between the exterior of the church with its secular English Collegiate Gothic front elevation and the sanctuary and heightens the parishioners awareness of being in a sacred space.

The church has a full basement consisting of a large fellowship hall in the center of the basement which is entered by stairs from the vestibule and through the lobby. Flanking the lobby is a nursery and large classroom and a flight of stairs leading to the outside. To the east of the fellowship hall is a large kitchen with a janitor's closet, a furnace room and classrooms and in the northeast corner a flight of stairs leading to a rear door, the sanctuary and the balcony area. On the other side of the fellowship hall are three classrooms, two smaller rooms and stairs leading to the sanctuary and the balcony.

Architectural Integrity and Condition

The condition of the First Methodist Episcopal Church is exemplary. The parishioners are proud of their church and have had an annual maintenance program since the church was erected. The church has retained its architectural integrity even though there have been three alterations to the fabric of the church. Two of the three alterations have been cited, the removal of the the skylight over the sanctuary and the insertion of a door in the place of a window on the second story of the rear elevation. The third alteration occurred in 2001, when clear-glass storm windows were inserted on the interior of the clerestory windows to prevent a loss of heating and cooling.

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Historical Development

The First Methodist Episcopal Church located at 219 West Stafford, in Stafford, Kansas qualifies for the National Register of Historic Places nomination under **Criterion C**, because it presents an imaginative interpretation of a Prairie style church with its stream-lined English Collegiate Gothic exterior and its sanctuary inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple sanctuary.

The Gothic Revival style had its origins in Great Britain and took hold on the eastern seaboard of this country. Initially, the style was used for public buildings by such notable early American architects as Benjamin Latrobe in his Bank of American of 1807 and William Strickland in his Masonic Hall of 1808, both in Philadelphia. Although the Gothic Revival style was also used for commercial and domestic buildings, it found its greatest expression in ecclesiastical architecture.

The English Collegiate Gothic style is a secular variation of the Gothic Revival and was based upon the Gothic buildings at Cambridge and Oxford University. Originally, the term had several variations and probably originated with the architect Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892). In Davis's office diary for 1845-1846, he refers to domestic designs as "Collegiate style," "Collegiate Gothic Villa style," and "English Collegiate style."⁴ Davis was among the pioneers who used the English Collegiate Gothic style on college campuses and was the first to design an entire campus in that style at the Virginia Military Institute (1848-1850) in Lexington, Virginia. Throughout the nineteenth century, it was understood that the term Collegiate Gothic referred to English academic architecture and not to any other European country's architecture.

In all probability, it was the architect Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942), an outspoken advocate of the Gothic style, who was responsible for adding Gothic to the term "English Collegiate style." Cram designed a number of buildings on college and university campuses in the English Collegiate Gothic style. The English Collegiate Gothic style partook of the same characteristics

⁴ Paul Venable Turner, *Campus: An American Planning Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984), p.124, p. 317.

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as the Gothic revival. In varying degrees English Collegiate Gothic buildings are characterized by pointed Gothic arches, stained glass, lancet windows, wall and flying buttresses, fortress towers, crenellation, battered walls and ribbed vaulting. The main building materials of the style were stone, as exemplified by the numerous English Collegiate Gothic buildings on the Yale campus by James Gamble Rogers (1917-1921 & 1927) and brick with stone trim, as exemplified by the University of Richmond (1910-1914), whose campus plan was designed by Cram and who also designed many of the school's buildings. In the Midwest and especially in Kansas, brick with limestone trim was the prevalent building material, as it is for the First Methodist Episcopal Church.

The exterior of the Stafford church is defined by its English Collegiate Gothic front elevation. The salient English Collegiate Gothic feature setting the tone for the church's exterior is the four stepped-wall buttresses that flank and alternate with the three entrance doors. The other Gothic feature is a frieze decorated with disks located above each of the three entrance doors and a second frieze just below the roof line that wraps around the building (Plate 3). According to Schuler's design, the front elevation was to have a set of eight small lancet windows above each of the three entrance doors, instead of the transoms present on the front elevation. Had the building committee followed Schuler's design, the three sets of lancet windows would have added a High Gothic character to the front elevation.

The defining characteristic of the Stafford's Methodist church is its sanctuary which is in the form of an auditorium. Auditorium-type churches were radically removed from the traditional basilican churches with their linear progression from nave and side aisles to transepts, altar and apse. Of course, the auditorium-style church has a long lineage beginning with the Early Christian church in the round, which became a fixation of Italian Renaissance architects.

With the Reformation and the rise of Protestant denominations the transformation of the basilican church occurred. In the Protestant church the sermon and its audibility were of paramount importance, and the congregation became an active participant in the service, partaking in the liturgy and the Communion. The Protestant worship space known as the "temple protestant" became in America the meeting house and later the auditorium-style church

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popular with the Unitarians, the Christian Science church and other denominations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

By far the most extraordinary feature of the First Methodist Episcopal Church is the sanctuary's ceiling lighting. Arrayed across the ceiling in six rows of six are thirty-six stained glass boxes termed "sunlight glass" for the predominate yellow color issuing from them. Each box has wood strips that divide and subdivide each square with small green stained-glass squares in the inner and outer corners of each square. Each glass box was illuminated by a skylight situated in the middle of the roof. Hanging from the four corners of the ceiling are pyramidal yellow stained-glass lamps with colorful chevrons down the center of each of the four sides of the pyramid.

In 1955, when a new roof was installed, the skylight was closed because it constantly leaked. In place of the natural light from the skylight, a light bulb was inserted in each light box to provide illumination. This alteration to Schuler's plan has enriched the quality of the "sunlight" issuing from the glass boxes, providing a steady stream of light during the day as well as in the evening.

"Light screen," the term Wright used to describe his stained glass windows, was an integral part of his architecture from 1886 through the 1920s.⁵ Wright used light to great effect to illuminate and define space and to integrate nature with the interiors of his residences, or as Wright declared, light allows the inhabitant to commune with nature without being buffeted by it. His Prairie School residences are filled with light screens composed of abstract patterns with muted colors taken from nature and set in casement sashes.

Wright also employed his light screens as skylights in many of his residences, inserting them in barrel vaulted and flat ceilings. An early example of such treatment are the barrel vaulted ceiling in the playroom of his Oak Park home (1895) and the flat ceiling of his Oak Park studio (1898-1900). Another spectacular light-filled barrel vaulted ceiling is the one in the living room ceiling of the second Francis W. Little residence (1912-1914), now in the

⁵ Julie L. Sloan, *Light Screens: The Complete Leaded-Glass Windows of Frank Lloyd Wright*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2001), pp. 29-33.

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Metropolitan Museum of Art. Light screen panels are also found in many of Wright's dining room ceilings, such as the Tomek residence (1901-1906) and the Allen House (1916-1917), his last Prairie School residence. In each dining room the length of the light screen panel was determined by the length of the dining room table also designed by Wright. But his most magnificent use of skylights is the sanctuary ceiling of Unity Temple (1905-1908).

Without light filtered through the clerestory windows and the skylight boxes in the ceiling, Unity Temple's sanctuary would be a dead space. According to Wright, the ceiling became sunlight with the twenty-five ceiling boxes filtering the light through amber light screens so that: "Thus managed the light would, rain or shine, have the warmth of sunlight."⁶

Schuler certainly understood Wright's concept that "light is the beautifier of the building."⁷ Following his example, Schuler bathed the sanctuary of the Stafford church in a warm yellow light in imitation of sunlight and as a reference to Jesus as the Light of the World, or as Wright stated: "by way of glass the sunlit space as a reality becomes [a] most useful servant of a higher order of the human Spirit."⁸

The present church is the third building to be erected on the site. After many years of holding services in private homes, the second floor of a commercial building on Stafford's Main Street and in Stafford's first school house, a church was erected in 1883. This church was a modest frame structure in the Gothic Revival style, with pointed Gothic windows, and at the corner was the entrance and a tall bell tower surmounted by a spire. By the beginning of the twentieth century the modest frame church could not accommodate the growing parish. In 1905, the old frame church was placed to one side and a new Gothic style brick church erected in its place. The new church was L-shaped with pointed Gothic windows and a tall bell tower located at the juncture of the L and punctuated by pointed Gothic windows.⁹

⁶ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography*. 1932. (Reprint, New York: Horizon Press, 1977), p. 180.

⁷ Sloan, *Light Screens*, p. 41.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ n. a., *History of the First Methodist Church of Stafford, Kansas*, pp. 2-4.

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By 1915, the second church was too small for its growing congregation and during the war years the walls of the church were badly cracked. Contractors advised that it would be more practical and economical to raze the church. Following the contractors recommendations, the parishioners decided to proceed with the design and building of a third church. A building committee was formed and they studied church design, structure and material. The committee then visited many new churches in Stafford and in south-central Kansas before selecting as their model the Riverside Christian Church in the Riverside neighborhood of Wichita, Kansas.¹⁰

The Riverside Church of Christ was organized in 1921 and a year later construction of a new church began.¹¹ By April 1922, the church was completed at a cost of \$45,000.00.¹² The architect was Don Schuler of Wichita. An article in the *Wichita Eagle* newspaper described Schuler's church as "one of the most beautiful and distinctive in Wichita. The architectural design is different from any other church in the city and is creating very favorable comment."¹³

We do not know what prompted the First Methodist Episcopal Church's building committee to select a church style in direct contrast to the medieval church tradition that prevailed in this country and that was certainly at variance with Stafford's two Gothic Revival style churches that preceded it. By any standard, it was a bold choice for a church building committee from a small town on the Kansas prairie to make. Good design has an innate appeal that can dissolve traditional tastes and ingrained cultural habits. But, in all likelihood, the building committee was probably enthralled with the sanctuary of the Riverside Church of Christ, although they were probably not aware of the background of the architect, Don Schuler. A comment in the *Wichita Eagle* at the time of the church's dedication captures the appeal that the church's sanctuary probably had for Stafford's building committee. "One of the unique things about the building is the "sunlight glass." There is a skylight above the main auditorium containing 36 separate glasses with an electric light bulb over

¹⁰ Ibid., p.5. In the history of the Stafford Methodist Church the Riverside Church of Christ is incorrectly titled the Riverside Christian Church.

¹¹ n. a., *Riverside Church of Christ*, November, 1922

¹² The church was demolished in 1965, because the congregation chose to have a new church on the site rather than deal with the problem of access for the handicapped

¹³ *Wichita Eagle*, April 29, 1923, p. 12.

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each. At night, with the electric lights turned on, there is the same effect as in the daytime, giving a constant daylight effect. This feature is said to be the only one in a church in this section of the country."¹⁴ But the three men who comprised the church's building committee were not without their detractors. "These men, of course, took much criticism because it was impossible to please the entire congregation."¹⁵

Don Schuler of Schuler Company of Wichita came to Stafford and helped make the final plans. The total cost of the church was approximately \$30,000 of which \$18,940 had been raised through subscriptions by 1923. Although Schuler provided the design for the new church, he was not employed to oversee the church's construction. This was done by the church building committee. The committee hired the local H. C. McCurdy Lumber Company as purchasing agent and local contractors were hired to build the church.¹⁶ The Depression, Dust Bowl and Second World War hindered the rapid payment of the church's construction debt. But by 1944, the final debt payment was made and on February 27, 1944, a mortgage burning ceremony was held to celebrate the termination of the church's indebtedness.¹⁷

Until 1990 when the Allen-Lambe Foundation acquired Frank Lloyd Wright's Allen House from Wichita State University, Don Buel Schuler (1888-1972) and his architectural career in Wichita had been forgotten. With the discovery that he was Wright's site architect for the building of the Allen House (1917-1918), he and his architectural accomplishments in Wichita have been rescued from oblivion.

Don Buel Schuler was born in Englewood, Kansas in 1888, and came to Wichita with his family at early age (Plate 10). His father Buel M. Schuler was a successful building contractor in Wichita and was joined by his three children, Don, Mildred and Ivan in the business. Don as well as his sister and brother all graduated from Fairmount College (now Wichita State University). He graduated with honors in chemistry and Cum Laude with a major in

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ n. a., *History of the First Methodist Church of Stafford, Kansas*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.6.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

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Mathematics-Physical in 1911.¹⁸ After graduation, Schuler worked in the Kansas City, Missouri Engineer Office designing sewer pipe. In the autumn of 1913, he enrolled at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana where he received a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Engineering in June, 1916.¹⁹

While studying for his architecture degree, Schuler spent his summers in the Chicago architectural office of Francis Berry Byrne (1883-1967).²⁰ Byrne received his training as an architectural apprentice in Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park studio, turning rough preliminary designs into working drawings. One of the projects that he worked on was Wright's design for Unity Temple, before leaving Wright's studio to start his own career in 1908.²¹ In 1914, Byrne assumed responsibility for managing the Chicago office of Walter Burley Griffin, another of Wright's Oak Park studio protégés. It was there in the summer of 1915 that Schuler was working when Wright visited the office looking for a draftsman to work on the designs for the Wichita residence of Elsie N. and Henry J. Allen. According to Schuler's sister, Mildred, Wright hired Schuler. In the winter of 1916, Schuler took the train to Spring Green and entered the office of Frank Lloyd Wright to work on the Allen House design.²² From Spring Green he was sent to Wichita as Wright's site architect to oversee the construction of the Allen House.²³

After completion of the Allen House, Schuler had an architectural practice in Wichita for ten years. After a prosperous career in Wichita, he moved his family in 1926 to Mobile, Alabama where he worked for seven years in the office of George B. Rogers. In 1933 Schuler moved again, this time to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, so his three daughters could attend the University of Alabama. For the first two years in Tuscaloosa, he worked as an Engineer Inspector for the Public Works Administration, and for the next seventeen years, he had a very lucrative architectural practice, designing churches,

¹⁸ Student Records office, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.

¹⁹ Transcript Department, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois.

²⁰ Author's interview with Mildred Schuler, 2 May 1993.

²¹ H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries* (New York: W. Norton & Company, 1976), pp. 284-285.

²² Author's interview with Mildred Schuler, 2 May 1993.

²³ Don Schuler, Wichita, Kansas to Frank Lloyd Wright, 8 March 1916, SOO5D09 [Correspondence of Frank Lloyd Wright], The Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Arizona.

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schools, his own and other residences, as well as commercial buildings.²⁴ Schuler's ten years in Wichita were very fruitful for him. He designed four residences all of which, with one exception, were done in the Prairie style: his own residence of 1919 in the Fairmont neighborhood of Fairmount College (demolished in 1993); and three residences in the developing College Hill neighborhood. The Gill residence, built in 1922 on the foundations of an old farm house, is located at Bluff and Second Street, a few blocks from the Allen House to which it is stylistically indebted; the residence at 4023 East Waterman located on the southern edge of College Hill; and the American Colonial residence of M. C. and Gwendolyn H. Naftzger of 1917. In addition, Schuler designed three commercial buildings in downtown Wichita, none of which bore any allegiance to the Prairie style. He reserved his most imaginative work for the five churches he designed, three in Wichita which have been demolished, one in Augusta, now owned by the Church of the Nazarene, which retained Schuler's Art deco exteriors, but destroyed his sanctuary, and one in Stafford, Kansas. Of these churches, three of them in Augusta, Wichita, and Stafford were auditorium-style churches with sanctuaries patterned after the sanctuary of Wright's Unity Temple. The most unusual of all Schuler's design and the one that was ephemeral in nature is the Victory Arch made of wood with a white stucco finish and a span of seventy feet and a height of forty feet. It was located at Broadway and Douglas in the heart of downtown Wichita, and on May 9, 1919, Wichita's returning World War One soldiers paraded under the arch to a cheering crowd of 105,000.²⁵

The three auditorium-style churches Schuler designed were erected within a three year period of each other from the early to mid-1920's. The Riverside Church of Christ was the first to be erected in 1922. Augusta's First Methodist Episcopal Church followed in 1924 and a year later the corner stone of the First Methodist Episcopal Church was laid in 1925. The only church that did not have a Prairie style exterior was the Augusta First Methodist Episcopal Church which has a lavish Art Deco exterior. But all three sanctuaries were patterned after the sanctuary of Wright's Unity Temple and were dominated by light emanating from thirty-six "sunlight glass" boxes in the sanctuary's ceiling.

²⁴ Gene Ford, *The Tuscaloosa News*, 17 July 1994, p.4 F.

²⁵ *Wichita Beacon*, 7 January 1919, p 4 & 8 May 1919, p.1. Beccy Tanner, *Wichita Eagle*, 3 February 1994, n. p.

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Schuler certainly would have known and seen Wright's Unity Temple. The church was and is still considered to be one of his masterpieces and an icon among metropolitan Chicago churches. Furthermore, Barry Byrne, who employed Schuler during the summers while he attended the University of Illinois, worked on the Unity Temple drawings while in Wright's Oak Park studio.

Although Schuler's design for the exterior of the Stafford church was in the Prairie style, like the Riverside Church of Christ, the Stafford building committee did not slavishly follow its model. They departed from it radically on the exterior of the church, replacing the Prairie style front elevation with an English Collegiate Gothic elevation and on the side and rear elevations, replacing the Prairie style with a modified English Collegiate Gothic style (Plates 11 & 12). By contrast, the committee followed Schuler's design for the interior and in particular for the sanctuary that was a copy of the Riverside Church of Christ's sanctuary. Of course, both of the church interiors were patterned after the sanctuary of Wright's Unity Temple with two basic differences. Wright's sanctuary had twenty-five stained glass boxes and a double balcony on the rear and side elevations whereas in the Stafford church there were thirty-six stained glass boxes and one balcony at the rear and side elevations (Plate 13).

But these are inconsequential differences. For Schuler has captured the essence of Wright's Unity Temple sanctuary in the First Methodist Episcopal Church. Furthermore, the church stands as a worthy representative and reminder of the Riverside Church of Christ that was demolished in 1965.

The First Methodist Episcopal Church is an extraordinary edifice sitting in the middle Kansas prairie. Beloved by generations of its parishioners and in excellent condition, the church will be a worthy addition to Kansas's architectural heritage and to that of the nation.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The First Methodist Episcopal Church occupies Lots Twenty (20), Twenty-one (21) and Twenty-two (22) in Baumgartner Addition of Stafford, Kansas. The property is bounded on the south by West Stafford Street, on the west by Park Street, and adjacent property lines on the north and east.

Boundary Justification

The boundary contains all property historically associated with the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Stafford, Kansas.